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ABOUT THE CLASSIFICATION

OVERVIEW

The first edition of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) (ABS Cat. No. 1267.0) was published in 1997 to meet a statistical and administrative need for a classification of languages. It was designed for use in the collection, aggregation and dissemination of data relating to languages spoken in Australia and used to classify language use associated with the language variables, 'First Language Spoken', 'Languages Spoken at Home', 'Main Language Spoken' and 'Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home'. The ASCL has been widely used within the ABS and by other organisations, with health, community services, and education organisations adopting the ASCL in a number of their administrative and service delivery collections.

The classification was developed through extensive research, stakeholder consultation and data analysis. Census Population and Housing data were used to separately identify languages spoken in Australia by a significant number of speakers. At the time of publication, it was thought that the language profile of Australia would alter over time due to changing migration patterns and that it may be necessary to add languages to the classification. Consequently, a second edition of the ASCL was published in 2005.

Since the review of the ASCL in 2005, some languages within Australia have emerged, undergone name changes or experienced an increase or reduction in their numbers. Examination of the 2006 Census data and information from stakeholders and external sources indicated that some aspects of the classification required

additions, removals or changes to improve its accuracy and applicability. As a result a minor review of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) was undertaken. This review aims to maintain the ASCL's relevance and usability, and to provide a more comprehensive representation of languages in Australian society.

DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE

The definition of language has not changed as a result of the ASCL review and while this publication does not attempt to offer an extensive definition of language, the following definition encompasses the basic elements of language as it is classified in the ASCL.

The Macquarie Dictionary (Fifth Edition, 2009) defines language as:

"Communication by voice in the distinctively human manner, using arbitrary auditory symbols in conventional ways with conventional meanings. Any set or system of such symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people, who are thus enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another.."

The ASCL does not distinguish between a separate language or dialect. A dialect can be described as a variety of language, identifiable by its vocabulary and grammar, spoken by people in a particular geographical area or by members of a particular group or social class.

Language entities considered dialects are separately identified for the following reasons:

- failure to separately identify language dialects would decrease the usefulness of language data collection and reduce the analytical value of the classification
- the majority of stakeholders consulted preferred to include certain dialects as separate categories.

The languages of the classification include:

- those which are universally recognised as distinct and separate languages
- separately identified dialects
- creoles and pidgins
- a group of linguistically distinct languages (American languages)
- sign languages.

SCOPE OF THE CLASSIFICATION

All world languages are in scope of the classification. Languages with significant numbers of speakers in Australia are separately identified within the classification structure. Actively spoken Australian Indigenous languages are also separately identified. Languages which are not separately identified are included in the most appropriate residual category of the classification.

Extinct or dead languages spoken for religious or academic purposes are included in the most appropriate residual category of the classification. However, if sufficient numbers of an extinct or dead language are

spoken in Australia, it is separately identified in the classification, for example Latin.

Sign languages are defined as a communication system using gestures rather than speech or writing (*The Macquarie Dictionary* (Fifth Edition, 2009), and are included in the classification. Languages excluded from the classification cover those not commonly used as a means of communicating between people, such as computer languages.

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BUILDING THE CLASSIFICATION

DESIGN CONSTRAINTS

Development of a manageable classification structure was constrained by a requirement to represent the approximately 6,000 languages spoken worldwide. To achieve this, languages with 100 or more speakers in Australia have been separately identified, with the exception of Australian Indigenous languages. Any Australian Indigenous language with three or more known speakers is separately identified.

CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE

The ASCL has a three-level hierarchical structure. The classification is available in the [ASCL data cube](#).

Languages

The third and most detailed level of the classification consists of 432 languages including 44 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories. The 432 languages include 216 Australian Indigenous languages (including 20 nec categories), and 216 languages (including 24 nec categories) which cover the rest of the world. This is an increase of 73 languages (including 6 nec categories) since the second edition in 2005. This increase includes 48 (including 6 nec categories) additional Australian Indigenous languages.

Narrow Groups

The second level of the classification comprises 51 narrow groups of languages similar in terms of the classification criteria, including seven 'other' categories which consist of languages which do not fit into a particular narrow group. For three narrow groups of Australian Indigenous languages (Narrow Group 81 Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages, Narrow Group 82 Yolngu Matha and Narrow Group 83 Arandic) three digit levels are positioned between the narrow group and language level of the classification. They provide meaningful and useful groups of languages. There are 13 three digit level categories.

Broad Groups

The first and most general level of the classification comprises nine broad groups of languages including one 'other' category. Broad groups are formed by aggregating geographically proximate narrow groups.

CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA AND THEIR APPLICATION

Classification criteria are the principles by which classification categories are aggregated to form broader categories within a classification structure. The classification criteria were not changed as result of the 2011 ASCL. The following classification criteria are used:

- the relationship between languages as a result of their evolution from a common ancestral language (genetic affinity)
- area in which a language originated (geographic proximity). This also refers to the area where a language was first acknowledged as a distinct entity.

In the ASCL, languages are grouped into progressively broader categories generally on the basis of genetic affinity and the geographic proximity of areas where particular languages originated. This allows populations of language speakers whose languages have evolved from common linguistic roots to be grouped in analytically useful ways. Secondary use of geography at the narrow group level also enables the formation of more meaningful residual language categories.

The classification criteria were not always applied when creating the residual categories. Broad Group 9 Other Languages consists of narrow groups of languages which are not linguistically or geographically related, and do not have sufficient speakers in Australia to form separate broad groups. At the narrow group level the residual categories contain languages which originated in the geographic area but which are not linguistically related to the other narrow groups. At the language level of the classification, the residual categories are comprised of languages which are genetically related and geographically proximate to the other languages of the narrow group. These languages have not been separately identified in the classification because they do not have sufficient numbers of speakers in Australia to form a category of their own.

Although the design of the classification is generally undertaken using the classification criteria to form the language groups, the criteria was applied differently in different parts of the classification structure. This method has been used so that the classification makes sense and is useful in an Australian statistical context.

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ABOUT CODES



CODE SCHEME

One, two and four digit codes have been assigned to the first, second and third-level units of the classification respectively. The one digit code identifies the broad group in which each narrow group of languages is contained. The two digit codes identify the narrow group in which each language is contained. The four digit codes represent each of the 432 languages.

Three of the narrow groups of Australian Indigenous languages (Narrow Group 81 Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages, Narrow Group 82 Yolngu Matha and Narrow Group 83 Arandic) contain an extra level between the narrow group and language levels of the classification. They are identified by a three digit code, the first two digits of which identify the narrow group.

Separately identified languages of the second edition have for the most part retained the same code in this review. Languages identified for the first time have been allocated previously unused codes. The purpose of this is to limit disruption to time series data. The alphabetical order of languages within narrow groups have been disrupted in some instances to keep language codes consistent.

ABS periodically reviews its classifications to take account of relevant changes. The ASCL code scheme is devised so that any future changes to the classification structure are easily accommodated. However, in order that the classification remain standard, users should not make changes to the structure. Users should contact

the ABS and identify any apparent problems they encounter in the course of implementation, data collection, or data analysis.

CODES FOR RESIDUAL CATEGORIES

Each narrow group has a residual category, which is a four digit code, consisting of the two digits of the narrow group, followed by 99. These categories are described as 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories. All languages which are not separately identified in the classification are included in the residual 'nec' category of the narrow group to which they relate.

Codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level, consisting of the broad group code followed by 9. They are termed 'Other' and include separately identified languages which do not fit into any of the narrow groups within the broad group. This classification contains seven such residual categories.

Residual categories are part of the ASCL structure and should not be created or used to 'dump' responses which contain insufficient information to code to a separately identified category of the classification.

SUPPLEMENTARY CODES

Supplementary codes are used to process inadequately described responses in statistical collections. The codes are of three types:

- four digit codes ending with one, two or three zeros
- four digit codes commencing with three zeros (operational codes)
- four digit codes commencing with three zeros (special supplementary codes).

Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (nfd) codes. These codes classify responses to a question about language which cannot be coded to the language level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

Responses which do not relate directly to a particular language category, but which are within the range of languages relating to a particular narrow group, are coded to that narrow group. Such responses are allocated an 'nfd' code consisting of the two digit code of the narrow group followed by 00.

Language responses which do not directly relate to a particular narrow group or language category, but are within the range of languages relating to a particular broad group, are coded to that broad group. These responses are allocated an 'nfd' code consisting of the one digit code of the broad group followed by 000. Language responses which can only be coded at the broad or narrow group levels of the classification can be processed within a collection coded at the four digit level.

Four digit codes commencing with 000 are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses such as inadequately described languages, etc., which contain insufficient information to be allocated a language, narrow group or broad group code.

Supplementary codes are not part of the classification structure. They exist for operational reasons only, and no data would be coded to them if sufficiently detailed responses were obtained in all instances. (See full list of Supplementary codes in the [ASCL data cube](#).)

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INDEX FOR CODING RESPONSES

WHY WE USE IT

Responses provided in statistical and administrative collections are not always identical to the recognised names of the classification categories. A coding index is therefore required to link responses to the classification so that they can be coded to an appropriate category. The coding index contains a comprehensive list of the most likely responses to questions relating to language and their correct classification codes. (See the coding index in alphabetical and numerical code order in the [ASCL data cube](#))

HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

The coding index was developed through literature research, consultation with stakeholders, and analysis of existing ABS data, including responses obtained in ABS statistical collections. It is used to code responses to questions such as, 'First Language Spoken', 'Languages Spoken at Home' and 'Main Language Spoken'.

As well as the actual language, a number of categories cover dialects and regional language varieties not separately identified in the classification. In addition to its coding function, this numerical index can be used to clarify the nature, extent and varietal content of each language category.

CODING RULES

When coding responses in statistical or administrative collections, the following rules apply:

- Responses which match exactly with an entry in the coding index are assigned the code allocated to that index entry.
- Responses which relate directly to a language category are coded to that language category. Such instances include responses which are an exact match with the language category title except in terms of alternative spelling, the use of abbreviations, or the use of foreign or idiosyncratic words, etc., and responses which match the title in terms of the fundamental or basic words of the title and differ only in terms of qualifying or extraneous words.
- Responses which relate directly to a language category because they describe a variety, dialect or geographic variation of the language are coded directly to that language category.
- Responses which cannot be identified as relating to a separately identified language in the classification are assigned a residual category code, or a supplementary code.

A response should only be coded to a residual category if it is clear that it belongs in that category. Responses which are not precise enough to be coded to any category should be assigned the appropriate supplementary code.

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USING THE CLASSIFICATION

EDITING SPECIFICATIONS

It is important when validating input codes at editing stage, manipulating data, and deriving output items, that all valid codes are included in every specification. The full range of valid codes includes all the codes in the classification structure and all supplementary codes.

CODING, STORAGE AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data should be collected, classified and stored at the language level of the classification, ensuring flexibility of statistical output and resulting in more detailed analysis. It also maintains information for future use. Comparisons can be made with previous data using different classifications.

However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as concerns with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the collection or output of data at the lower levels of the classification. The use of a standard classification will enhance data comparability even though it may not always be possible to disseminate data at the most detailed level.

The hierarchical structure of the classification allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their particular purposes. Data can be presented at the broad group level, narrow group level, or the language level. Significant languages within a narrow group can be presented

separately with the remaining languages of the narrow group aggregated.

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ABOUT THE REVIEW

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

Analysis of 2006 Census data revealed that the language profile of Australia has changed since the second edition of the ASCL and that review of the classification would improve its usefulness and ensure it would be up to date for use in the 2011 Census.

A minor review of the ASCL was undertaken to:

- separately identify a number of emerging languages, based on changes in immigration patterns in Australia
- improve the coding index
- rename a number of categories and groups to make the names more accurate
- identify diminishing languages in Australia
- ensure data is available for languages with few speakers, including Australian Indigenous languages
- improve the profile and coverage of Indigenous languages based on 'Closing the Gap' initiatives backed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and other government agencies
- respond to stakeholder queries and feedback which have expressed the view that ASCL should categorise as many Indigenous languages as possible, raised specific matters about the classification of some languages, and indicated that more should be done to identify emerging language groups

- improve the accuracy and precision with which Australian Indigenous languages are identified
- restructure the narrow groups of Broad Group 8, Australian Indigenous Languages.

The review is intended to be an update only, there has been no attempt to review the conceptual model underpinning the classification or to make major structural changes. Wherever categories in the classification have been moved or deleted the codes for these categories have not been re-used.

HOW IT WAS DONE

The following research activities were undertaken when reviewing the ASCL second edition:

Statistical analysis

Analysis of the aggregated responses to the 2006 Census language question was undertaken. It was proposed that languages within 'not elsewhere classified' categories which recorded over 100 responses be identified separately in new categories. Some exceptions were made if a language was of specific interest, such as Australian Indigenous languages, where the criterion for separate identification is three or more speakers.

Research

External research was conducted to:

- confirm the appropriate terminology to be used for categories in the classification, and assess the accuracy of the coding of languages at the broad, narrow and language group levels
- assess the accuracy of code assignments and linkages
- identify Australian Indigenous languages
- identify new language groups based on immigration patterns between 2005 and 2010.

As a part of the Federal Government's approach to Closing the Gap, Australian Indigenous languages are supported through the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR) program. This program assists the revival of Indigenous languages by supporting community based language projects and resources, and language research. Indigenous languages were investigated through the MILR program, ASCL queries between 2005 and 2010 and the online Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages database. Language and speaker number data found in these sources was compared with information gathered through general research of Government, Australian Indigenous language, interpreter and academic sources.

Non-Indigenous languages to be reviewed were identified from queries between 2005 and 2010. Language data, including alternate spellings were investigated on the 'Ethnologue' database and other external web sites. The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) provided information about translator and interpreter use for languages emerging in Australia. The National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship supplied data on languages spoken by recent immigrants.

Stakeholder Consultation

The objective was to ensure that stakeholders, including language experts and peak bodies with knowledge of emerging and expanding language groups were consulted and that each major language was represented.

One round of consultation was undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders, who provided information about:

- speaker numbers
- new languages spoken in Australia
- appropriate and useful classification of language groups
- growth and decline of languages, including Indigenous languages
- index coverage
- structure of the classification.

Following consultation, comments were analysed and reviewed and where necessary appropriate changes to the classification were made. The recommendations of stakeholders were compared to information gathered through external research and Census 2006 line count data for 'not further defined' (nfd) and 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) responses.

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WHAT'S CHANGED

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

This is a minor review and there are no proposed changes to the broad level of the classification. Changes have been limited to the name change of one narrow group, to more accurately reflect the languages within it, adding languages, removing some language names, amending the names of some languages and adding appropriate entries to the expanded structure and coding index. These changes are based on Census 2006 line count data, research from external sources, and stakeholder requests and queries.

LANGUAGES TO BE ADDED TO THE CLASSIFICATION

Indigenous Languages

48 Australian Indigenous languages have been added to the classification. The following additions were made:

- six languages to Narrow Group 81 Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages
- nine languages to Narrow Group 82 Yolngu Matha
- six languages to Narrow Group 83 Cape York Peninsula Languages
- nine languages to Narrow Group 86 Arandic
- one language to Narrow Group 87 Western Desert Languages

- two languages to Narrow Group 88 Kimberley Area Languages
- 15 languages to Narrow Group 89 Other Australian Indigenous Language.

Non-Indigenous Languages

27 Non-Indigenous languages have been added to the ASCL. This is based on information including the number of humanitarian visas granted in Australia, migration levels, and Census and speaker number counts:

- the addition of Czechoslovakian, so described (3604) to Narrow Group 36 West Slavic
- Hazaragi (4107) has been added to Narrow Group 41 Iranic
- the addition of Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (4206), Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (4207) and Mandaean (Mandaic) (4208) to Narrow Group 42 Middle Eastern Semitic Languages
- Fijian Hindustani (5217) has been added to Narrow Group 52 Indo-Aryan
- Rohingya (6104) has been added to Narrow Group 61 Burmese and Related Languages
- Min Nan (7107) has been added to Narrow Group 71 Chinese
- 17 African Languages have been added to Narrow Group 92 African Languages
- Motu (Hiri Motu) (9503) and Tok Pisin (Neomelanesian) (9504) have been added to Narrow Group 95 Papua New Guinea Languages.

LANGUAGE GROUPS AND LANGUAGES WHICH HAVE BEEN RENAMED OR RE-DESCRIBED

Indigenous Languages

Ten Indigenous languages have been renamed or re-assigned codes in the ASCL, based on genetic affinity, and geographic and cultural information:

- Garrwa, Ngandi and Yanyuwa have all moved from their previous locations to Narrow Group 81 Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages
- Dhuwaya and Madarrpa have been relocated to 829 Other Yolngu Matha
- to exhaust language possibilities, 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) has been added to Yolngu Matha (8299)
- in response to stakeholder feedback, the language name Torres Strait Creole (8403) has been replaced with Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)
- Kija has moved to Narrow Group 88 Kimberley Area Languages.

Non-Indigenous Languages

To better reflect the languages in each group, the following languages have been renamed, deleted or re-described, based on research and stakeholder recommendations:

- the language Assyrian has been removed. It was previously used to describe Neo-Aramaic languages including Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic and Mandaean
- Haka (6102) has been renamed Chin Haka to correctly reflect that language group
- Teo Chew and Hokkien have been amalgamated into Min Nan (7107) to correctly classify them as a single language
- Narrow Group 95 has been renamed Papua New Guinea Languages. Its 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) code has been renamed Papua New Guinea Languages, nec
- Motu, also known as Hiri Motu, has been moved to Narrow Group 95

- the Papua New Guinea language Tok Pisin, also described as Neomelanesian, has been relocated to Narrow Group 95.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE EXPANDED STRUCTURE

Indigenous Languages

20 Indigenous language entities within the expanded structure (three digit level) of the classification have been added or assigned different codes, based on stakeholder advice:

- Gundjeihmi, Kune, Kuninjku, Kunwinjku and Mayali have moved to the new expanded structure of Kunwinjku (817) as dialects of the Kunwinjku language
- included in the new third level category, Burarran (818) are dialects Burarra, Gun-nartpa and Gurr-goni
- Anmatyerr (861) has an expanded structure and includes the dialects Central Anmatyerr and Eastern Anmatyerr
- Arrernte (862) has been added as a third level category. Included in this expanded structure are Eastern Arrernte and Western Arrarnta
- 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) codes for Kunwinjku, Burraran, Anmatyerr and Arrernte, have been added to classification.

CHANGES TO THE CODING INDEX

Indigenous Languages

A number of changes have been made to Indigenous languages in the coding index which include:

- alternate names for languages have been added to the coding index
- some Indigenous languages have been re-grouped and re-coded and so their alternate names in the coding index have also changed in code structure
- a number of Indigenous languages have been added to 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories, including 89 Other Australian Indigenous Languages, nec
- Milngimbi will be deleted from the coding index as it is a place name not a language.

Non-Indigenous Languages

A number of changes have been made to non-Indigenous languages in the coding index. These changes include:

- Kurdish is broken into three language groups and these will be indexed
- various Karen dialects will be listed under code 6103 Karen, based on research and stakeholder feedback about Burmese languages
- a number of Chin languages will be listed under the code 6199 Burmese and Related Languages, nec
- Hokkien, Teo Chew, Fukien, Hainan and Taiwanese will be indexed under 7107
- several languages added to the classification have alternate names which will be added to the index
- changes have been made to the coding index for Chin. The term Chin now only applies to Burmese Chin Languages
- the coding index will be changed to correctly reflect Slovensky as a variant of Slovak (6303) rather than

Slovenian (3506)

- Aussie Pigeon and Aussie Pidgin (9401) will be deleted based on stakeholder advice and external research.

COMPARING CURRENT AND PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THE ASCL

The ABS urges users and providers of language data to collect, classify and disseminate data using the 2011 second edition of the ASCL from the time of its implementation. There will be circumstances where users need to convert data from the 2011 second edition to the 2005 second edition. To facilitate this process, a correspondence table between the classification structures of the 2011 second edition and 2005 second edition is provided. In most cases, the languages of the two editions of the classification retain a one-to-one relationship. The correspondence table itemises the code linkages between the languages, details the links between the broad groups and the narrow groups, and indicates the movement of particular languages between groups in the two structures. Correspondences are provided in the ASCL data cube.

The codes in both editions relate to the same entity. In some instances, there is not a direct relationship between the languages or language groupings of the structures of the two editions. Partial linkages at both the language and language group level are indicated by including the word 'part' after the name of the language or language group concerned.

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'The Australian Standard Classification of Languages was developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for use in the collection, storage and dissemination of all Australian statistical and administrative data relating to languages spoken in Australia.'

Revision 1 contains the updated classification based on a minor review.'

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This document was added or updated on 27/04/2012.

Changes implemented at 14/11/2012

Three entries have been modified in the correspondence table of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) Table 4.2 as follows:

- The 2011 (Second Edition) correspondence to the 2006 publication for the narrow group "French" was listed as "12" when it should have been listed as "21";
- The 2011 (Second Edition) correspondence to the 2006 publication for the narrow group "Kimberley Area Languages" was listed as "84" when it should have been listed as "88"; and
- The 2011 (Second Edition) correspondence to the 2006 publication for the language "Kukatja" was listed as "8506" when it should have been listed as "8706".

All of the relevant changes were applied to the ASCL in order improve the alignment between Table 4.1 and Table 4.2.

Changes implemented at 27/4/2012

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Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASCL	Australian Standard Classification of Languages
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
nec	not elsewhere classified
nfd	not further defined

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